



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913

PH (517) 373.3760 | FAX (517) 373.8661

www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/cropsey/

For Immediate Release
May 12, 2006

Contact: Ari Adler
517-373-5886

Sikkema and Cropsey appalled that governor refuses to remove partisanship from ballot certifications

*Governor turns her back on voters;
supports board members who violated court order*

LANSING — The governor today vetoed legislation moving control over the state's ballot-petition process from the partisan and controversial Board of State Canvassers to the nonpartisan State Bureau of Elections. For the past two years, the board has come under fire for refusing to place some valid voter initiatives on the state ballot, in the process defying the Michigan Constitution, the law, the courts, the legal advice of the attorney general's office and the call of Michigan citizens.

Last December, the Democrats on the board defied a Court of Appeals order charging the board to place the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative proposal on the 2006 ballot. The two Democrat members may soon appear in court on criminal contempt charges for refusing to obey that order. This is the first time a Board of State Canvassers member has faced criminal contempt charges. The Senate majority leader and others have called for their resignation, and the governor said they should resign if found in contempt.

"Today the governor has demonstrated a startling distrust of Michigan's civil servants, while supporting possibly the first gubernatorial appointees in the history of the state to be facing criminal contempt charges," said state Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, the lead sponsor of the legislative package. "Her veto puts our elections process at risk.

"Thankfully, the courts are protecting the constitutional rights of voters. Regardless of this veto, the Legislature will be watching to make sure the rule of law is upheld and voting rights protected. And we call on the board members to publicly state their support of the constitution, the law and the courts."

The legislation simply would have transferred what is essentially a rubber-stamp approval process from the Board of Canvassers to the state Bureau of Elections. The bureau currently does all the work of certifying petition signatures and language, and it

would have continued to do so under the bills vetoed today. The board generally approves the bureau's findings unless political agendas get in the way.

"The governor is simply looking for excuses and trying to defend indefensible actions by the two Democrat canvassers," said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. "I am renewing my call for the two Democrat members of the Board of State Canvassers to resign immediately rather than suffer the disgrace of a contempt hearing and further sully this process in the eyes of the voters."

In 2004, the Democrats on the board, against the advice of the attorney general's office and the State Bureau of Elections, refused to put a ballot question regarding same-sex marriage before voters and let them decide the matter. Also that year, the board rejected clear legal advice and clearly established court precedent on law when they refused to place Ralph Nader on the presidential ballot.

In a press conference late last year, after the Democrats on the board ignored the Court of Appeals order, the governor said, "If a court orders you to do something, whether you agree with it personally or not, you must obey the law."

The package of Senate and House bills would have made the director of the State Bureau of Elections responsible for approving the ballot petitions as to form and deciding whether ballot questions have received an adequate number of signatures to go before voters. The elections director is a nonpartisan, civil service position within the Secretary of State's Office. In addition, the measure would have brought Michigan in line with other states on this issue. Out of 24 states that have ballot-initiative laws, Michigan is the only state that employs a board of canvassers made up of political appointees to certify ballot petitions.

###